

Spring:

I was talking to my neighbor Chauncey the other day. We met on the road, each of us inspecting the work we had done on the woods filling our adjoining properties. He said to me, "It's great to put the hammer away, isn't it?" I said, "Sure Chaunce. Sure is." And we both continued the ambling examination of our recent labors. "Makes you glad you have thumbs again, as opposed to the previous situation." Chauncey has a way of putting things that might be called obtuse. But given time and the will to do it you can usually figure out where he's going with his thoughts. Usually. "I mean it's kind of the reason we live here, isn't it?" I scratched my chin and said, "I guess so." Chauncey continued, "What I mean is if the hammer didn't stop then who'd want to live here in the first place? A person can only take so much discomfort."

"Chauncey, may I ask you something?" Sure. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"Springtime, obviously. Living in our part of the world is like the story of the gent who would hit his own thumb with a hammer because it felt so much better when he stopped. Well, that's like us. If we didn't have the winters that we have then we wouldn't feel the same way about spring, would we? Wouldn't appreciate it like we do."

Chauncey's right. He always is.

Continuing our saunter down the lane it became more and more obvious that our long winter had indeed given way to spring. The turkeys were gobbling, the cowbirds burbling, the poppies popping and Chauncey sneezing. Spring.

From our vantage point on the eastern slope of Crystal Valley you can see down to Rte. 22 and up the other side where the box elders and cherries are the earliest to leaf out, where the violets and the pinks open to new, longer days. It's a great place to walk. It's a great place to walk and whistle. Whistling is excellent on spring walks. Winter whistling is tough because the notes will freeze right on your lips.

I used to harbor and intense dislike for winter. In my former life, a city life, winter was the enemy of a smoothly functioning business day. Getting to that 8:30 meeting through Chicago slush without ruining your \$200 loafers was a big deal. Catching a flight east at six in the morning is one thing but having to shovel the car out first creates a whole different level of stress. City folks tend to get all hunched over

and squinty in the winter. The corners of their mouths take a permanent set downwards. It seems like you get up in the morning just to fight the day. Then you do it again. And again. Around the beginning of March the weather forecast becomes more important than the market report, the world news and even the sports results. You begin to think that one more day of cold and wet just might break you.

Winter makes more sense here. The land needs time to rest. Growth is preceded by sleep. Snow waters the future. A cold snap of 20-30 below in February helps to keep the mosquitoes just under sparrow size in July. The simple truth is we need the winter. You just can't have what we have, flora, fauna and all of it, without Papa Winter.

Still and all, it sure is great when things start warming up and greening up and growing up. The first time you stand on the front porch with a fresh cup of coffee and the sun is actually warm on your face; it makes the entire winter worth the wait. There's something about dues paid and rewards earned. There's something about actually having toughed it out through the 25's, that's 25 inches of snow and 25 degrees below zero. That's what makes spring, SPRING.

We're fortunate, you and I, to know what a real spring is. And that's because we have our winter to contrast the seasons. We met a man this past January from Winnipeg. He was returning from South America (where it was summer) explaining to us that before he left home they had experienced ten days straight with a low temp of 40 below. His wife had just called to tell him the thermometer had risen above 5 below for the first time in three weeks. Now, that's a hammer! Imagine how *they* feel about spring.

So there I am with Chauncey, on the road down to Highway 16, when he stops and says, "You know, when we got that last snow, the one after Easter, my wife was ready to visit the kids in Fresno. It's not like Fern, and I don't like to admit it, but the winter was getting to us."

"Chauncey", I said, "what about the hammer and all?" "Oh, I don't know," he said, "It's all violins and roses now that it's spring. But I tell 'ya, every so often I think about leaving that hammer in the shop and picking up a paintbrush instead. Regardless of the thumb situation."

Chauncey's right again. I guess.